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## ABSTRACT

Student alcohol use is viewed as a major problem by college officials. To examine the frequency and consequences of college student alcohol use, 927 undergraduates completed a questionnaire which included demographic variables and items assessing the frequency and negative consequences of their drinking and the drinking behavior of their parents and friends. Analysis of results showed that 92% of the respondents reported drinking alcohol, and 47% reported intoxication at least once a week. About the same percentage of men and women reported drinking, but men reported more frequent intoxication and more negative consequences. Higher grades were associated with lower levels of drinking. No differences in students' drinking patterns were found as a result of parent alcohol problems, year in school, or place or residence, but students whose parents had drinking problems reported more negative consequences from their own drinking. About half the respondents were aware of alcohol-related problems in friends. Counseling, self-help groups, and campus-wide alcohol education programs should consider these differences in order to reach all groups having alcohol problems. (JAC)

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Student Alcohol Misuse:  
The Negative Effects of Drinking  
In College

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### Abstract

There has been an increased awareness and concern regarding alcohol use and misuse by college students. Using survey research methodology, 927 undergraduate students were questioned about the frequency and effects of their drinking. Associations among relevant variables with sex, grade point average, year in school, existence of parental alcohol problems, and living situation are presented.

Recently the use and misuse of alcohol by college students has received considerable attention and concern nationally. For example, during the last few years the Chronicle of Higher Education has published national survey data describing the use of alcohol on college and university campuses, (The Chronicle of Higher Education, 1982,1983). These studies indicate that college students are now choosing alcohol as their preferred drug and alcohol usage is viewed by college officials as a major problem. Many colleges now have alcohol-education programs, alcohol-education specialists on staff, and committees to focus on prevention of abuse.

As part of initiating alcohol programming at the University of Texas, Hill and Bugen (1979) found that 89 percent of their student sample reported drinking at least occasionally. Forty-nine percent of these students indicated having either started or increased their use of alcohol since entering the university. Twenty-one percent reported drinking at least two or three times a week. The primary reasons given for drinking were relaxation, sociability and "to relate better to other people". As a result of this study, alcohol-education programs are being developed at the University of Texas involving the cooperation of students, faculty and the Division of Student Affairs.

Hughes and Dodder (1983) compared the drinking patterns of college students in Texas, Oklahoma and New England. Although similarities as well as differences were found, students from all three regions reported a high incidence of drinking. The authors found fewer students from Texas and Oklahoma drank than did New Englanders, students from Oklahoma and New England

were more similar in the quantity and amount they drank than those from Texas, and the Oklahomans reported two to three times more alcohol related problems. The authors suggest that cultural and moral values play a role in drinking patterns and alcohol related problems, and that these factors may be useful in designing alcohol education programs.

Many studies report that more males than females drink and that males who drink consume more than females. While Biber, Nashway & Ammick (1980) support these findings, they also discuss research data that indicates a convergence of male and female drinking patterns. Although males and females are becoming more similar in their drinking behavior, there are significant sex-role differences. The authors conclude that college education programs would be enhanced if they would address these differences, thus providing students with an "opportunity to focus on the role of alcohol in relation to their personal objectives, life-styles and values."

A needs assessment focusing on the negative consequences of alcohol usage rather than the quantity consumed was conducted by Walfish, Wentz, & Associates (1981) at the University of South Florida. The researchers found that as a result of drinking students experienced numerous difficulties suggesting programming needs in the physical, legal, educational, and psychosocial areas.

The purpose of this study was to further examine the frequency and consequences of college student alcohol use. Associations between specific items and sex, grade point average (GPA), year in school, parental alcohol problems, and living situation (on or off campus) were explored.

## Method

Data were collected from a sample of 927 undergraduate students in 28 classes enrolled during the fall semester 1983 at Central Michigan University. Classes were selected in an attempt to provide equal representation of the different colleges and course levels. However, the sample was not random in a statistical sense. During class time all respondents were provided with a copy of a cover letter which explained the purpose of the study, a questionnaire and an optical scanning sheet upon which responses were recorded. Respondents were also given brief verbal instructions.

The questionnaire included demographic variables and items designed to assess respondent frequency of alcohol consumption and the negative consequences of their drinking. Other items concerned whether or not their parents had alcohol problems and students' observations regarding the incidence of alcohol concerns among their friends. The chi-square statistic was used to assess the degree of association among demographic variables and questionnaire items.

## Results

Data pertaining to the frequency and effects of alcohol consumption by university students are displayed in Tables 1, 2 & 3. A comprehensive analysis of this data is beyond the scope of this paper. However, specific population and group differences data most relevant to describing and understanding the impact of alcohol consumption on college student life will be discussed.

Examination of Table 1 shows that 92% of the sample reported drinking alcohol and 47% reported becoming intoxicated at least once a week. Further analysis shows drinking patterns which differ depending upon which specific demographic variables are considered. For example, approximately the same percentage of men and women consume alcohol (91% & 93% respectively). However, men tend to drink more drinks at one setting and become intoxicated more frequently than do women.

The data show an association between GPA and alcohol consumption and frequency of intoxication. In both cases higher GPAs tended to be associated with lower amounts of drinking. The results of the data analysis distinguished no differences in the drinking patterns of students as a function of parental alcohol problems, year in school, or on or off campus residence.

Examination of Table 2 shows that for this sample of college students there were various negative consequences associated with alcohol consumption. For example, college students reported doing something they later regretted (34%), bad hangovers (32%), interference with class attendance (18%), loss of memory (18%), conflicts with close friends of the opposite

sex (17%), foregoing other things due to the expense of alcohol (16%), and damaging property (5% university property and 8% other property). Thirty-seven percent of the respondents reported that their drinking had increased since coming to the university.

Review of Table 3 shows that many students also reported awareness of the effects of alcohol consumption on others. Students indicated they knew of alcohol related residence hall damage (56%), their friends having alcohol problems (45% non-university friends and 44% university friends) and 44% knew a student whose academic performance has suffered due to alcohol usage.

Additional review of Tables 2 & 3 show that the negative effects of drinking alcohol were experienced by male students more than female students and students with low GPAs more than students with high GPAs. Male students also tended to have more friends with drinking problems than female students. Males reported having increased their drinking since starting college to a greater extent than females.

Tables 2 & 3 display other significant associations between demographic variables and specific items. For example, students whose parents have or had alcohol problems, when compared to those students whose parents do not have alcohol problems, reported more family members and friends with alcohol concerns and more alcohol caused conflicts with close friend(s) of the same sex. These students when compared to other students reported experiencing more bad hangovers, loss of memory, and doing things they later regretted as a result of their alcohol use.

Students living in the residence halls reported more alcohol related conflicts than students living off campus. Upper level students reported more friends at Central Michigan University with drinking problems and having increased their drinking more since starting college than lower level students. Men reported more involvement in alcohol related property damage and interference with school performance than women. In general, lower GPAs in comparison to higher GPAs tended to be associated with more negative consequences of drinking alcohol.

#### Discussion

The results of this survey are consistent with previous research in that alcohol consumption was found to be common and associated with various negative consequences. Ninety-two percent of all respondents reported that they drink and 47% reported becoming intoxicated at least once a week.

About the same percentage of males and females drink. However, males when compared to females reported consuming more alcohol, more drinking with the specific intent of becoming drunk, more drinking while driving and driving while drunk (not shown in tables) and more drinking before class and while alone. Males also experienced more negative effects from their drinking than females. This included more damaging of property, preparing less for exams, attending class less frequently, and experiencing more black-outs.

These findings are consistent with other research which suggests that while male-female drinking patterns are becoming more similar, there are still significant sex-role differences (Biber, Nashway, & Annick, 1980). These and other sex differences in alcohol consumption should be considered in alcohol education programming and interventions.

The association between GPA and drinking patterns is frequently discussed in the literature on student alcohol usage. The data reported here show that for these students there is a negative association between GPA and alcohol consumption. Students with higher GPAs tended to consume less alcohol and experience fewer negative consequences from their drinking than students with lower GPAs. Though cause and effect statements cannot be made based upon this data, certainly an awareness of the possible relationship between GPA and alcohol consumption is important for university personnel. Students having academic or personal problems could be misusing alcohol. Individuals working with these students should carefully and in a non-threatening manner assess this possibility. Students with alcohol problems may then be encouraged to seek counseling from appropriate persons, self-help groups, or agencies.

For this group of students there were no significant differences in drinking patterns between students whose parents have or had alcohol problems and those whose parents do not have alcohol problems. However, those students whose parents have or had problems with alcohol reported having more friends with drinking problems, more conflict with close same-sex friends as a result of drinking, more bad hangovers, and more relatives other than their parents with drinking problems.

Students who came from these families may have a tendency to misuse alcohol. Programming efforts designed to increase knowledge about alcohol related issues would have special value to these students. This includes providing information relevant to the students own potential alcohol problems and the emotional concerns that often are characteristic of people who have grown up in families where alcohol is a significant problem (Black, 1982). These emotional issues may continue throughout adulthood unless appropriate interventions are made. The college years are an excellent time for these concerns to be acknowledged and constructively addressed. This may be through counseling and participating in self-help groups such as al-anon, narcotics anonymous, alcoholics anonymous, and groups for the adult children of alcoholic families.

There were no significant differences in the drinking patterns between students living on and off campus. Students living in residence halls, however, reported more alcohol related conflicts with members of the same sex. Students living off campus reported having more friends and relatives with drinking problems. Alcohol education programming typically takes place in the residence halls. Nevertheless, students living on and off campus have similar drinking patterns and consequently may have similar programming needs. Alcohol education activities need to be planned so they reach both on and off campus students.

This research was part of a variety of alcohol education activities which already exist, were proposed or were implemented on our campus this year. For example, the Vice President of Student Affairs has instituted

a dry fraternity rush effective Fall, 1984. Different options for the traditional street parties which begin after final exams have been explored. Establishing a BACCHUS Chapter on campus is being considered. A university wide alcohol task force, alcohol training for residence hall staff, and a faculty and staff assistance program also exist on our campus.

Other activities which could be undertaken include establishing wellness or health oriented residence halls or floors, consistently enforcing alcohol policies within residence halls, having an alcohol advertising policy for university publications and establishing separate, though coordinated, alcohol task forces for student government, fraternities and sororities, and residence halls.

Education and training programs might include alcohol and chemical dependency information at a wellness resource center, inservice training for professionals in contact with students who may be problem drinkers (medical doctors, administrators, student affairs staff, faculty, etc.), and a film library and resource materials which are readily accessible to students.

Individual and group activities might include individual substance abuse counseling, a support network for individuals who choose not to drink, a support group for students from alcoholic or chemically dependent families and a student assistance program emphasizing early intervention and referral for students with substance abuse or chemical dependency problems.

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TABLE 1

## Student Alcohol Consumption by Demographic Variables

|                                                      | % Population | % Sex   |        | % GPA   |         |         |         | % Year in School |       |       |       | % Parents Alcohol Problems |       | % Living Situation |            |
|------------------------------------------------------|--------------|---------|--------|---------|---------|---------|---------|------------------|-------|-------|-------|----------------------------|-------|--------------------|------------|
|                                                      |              | Male    | Female | 0.0-0.9 | 1.0-1.9 | 2.0-2.9 | 3.0-4.0 | Fr               | So    | Jr    | Sr    | No                         | Yes   | Residence Hall     | Off Campus |
| When you drink alcohol, how many drinks do you want? | (927)        | (349)   | (531)  | (3)     | (24)    | (457)   | (376)   | (170)            | (187) | (207) | (348) | (759)                      | (165) | (407)              | (444)      |
| none/don't drink                                     | 8            | 9       | 7      | 0       | 0       | 6       | 10      | 9                | 5     | 9     | 8     | 7                          | 9     | 9                  | 6          |
| 1 drink                                              | 9            | 5       | 11     | 0       | 8       | 8       | 12      | 7                | 11    | 9     | 10    | 9                          | 9     | 9                  | 8          |
| 2-3 drinks                                           | 32           | 19      | 40     | 0       | 29      | 30      | 34      | 33               | 29    | 29    | 35    | 32                         | 33    | 31                 | 30         |
| 4-5 drinks                                           | 30           | 28      | 31     | 67      | 50      | 30      | 30      | 32               | 37    | 28    | 28    | 30                         | 30    | 31                 | 32         |
| 6 or more drinks                                     | 22           | 39      | 11     | 33      | 13      | 26      | 15      | 19               | 18    | 27    | 21    | 22                         | 21    | 20                 | 24         |
| Chi Square                                           |              | 115.4** |        |         | 29.8*   |         |         |                  | 14.2  |       |       |                            | .5    | 4.8                |            |
| How often do you get intoxicated?                    | (927)        | (359)   | (529)  | (3)     | (24)    | (456)   | (375)   | (170)            | (187) | (206) | (346) | (756)                      | (165) | (407)              | (440)      |
| Never, once or twice in whole life                   | 18           | 14      | 22     | 0       | 21      | 15      | 24      | 20               | 13    | 21    | 18    | 19                         | 16    | 20                 | 15         |
| Less than or about once a month                      | 35           | 27      | 41     | 33      | 25      | 32      | 40      | 37               | 34    | 31    | 38    | 35                         | 36    | 36                 | 33         |
| About once a week                                    | 29           | 33      | 26     | 33      | 29      | 32      | 24      | 27               | 33    | 29    | 27    | 29                         | 27    | 29                 | 31         |
| Two or three times a week                            | 18           | 26      | 12     | 33      | 25      | 21      | 12      | 16               | 20    | 19    | 16    | 17                         | 19    | 16                 | 21         |
| Daily                                                | 0.2          | 1       | 0      | 0       | 0       | .4      | 0       | 0                | 0     | 1     | 0     | 0                          | 1     | 0                  | 1          |
| Chi Square                                           |              | 46.1**  |        |         | 32.6**  |         |         |                  | 10.6  |       |       |                            | 2.4   | 7.0                |            |

NOTE: Numbers in parentheses are numbers for each column.  
Percentages are percent of column total for each item.

\*  $p \leq .01$ \*\*  $p \leq .001$

TABLE 2

Negative Consequences of Drinking Alcohol by Demographic Variables

|                                                          | % Population | % Sex |        | $\chi^2$ | % GPA   |         |         |         | $\chi^2$ | % Year in School |       |       |       | $\chi^2$ | % Parents Alcohol Problems |       |          | % Living Situation |            | $\chi^2$ |
|----------------------------------------------------------|--------------|-------|--------|----------|---------|---------|---------|---------|----------|------------------|-------|-------|-------|----------|----------------------------|-------|----------|--------------------|------------|----------|
|                                                          |              | Male  | Female |          | 0.0-0.9 | 1.0-1.9 | 2.0-2.9 | 3.0-4.0 |          | Fr               | So    | Jr    | Sr    |          | No                         | Yes   | $\chi^2$ | Res. Hall          | Off Campus |          |
|                                                          | (927)        | (351) | (532)  |          | (3)     | (24)    | (459)   | (377)   |          | (170)            | (187) | (208) | (350) |          | (762)                      | (165) |          | (408)              | (446)      |          |
| Damaged CMU Property                                     | 5            | 9     | 2      | 22.7***  | 33      | 13      | 5       | 4       | 9.5*     | 4                | 9     | 4     | 3     | 8.2*     | 5                          | 6     | .2       | 6                  | 4          | 1.5      |
| Damaged property that did not belong to CMU              | 8            | 18    | 2      | 64.6***  | 0       | 4       | 11      | 5       | 9.1*     | 7                | 12    | 8     | 7     | 5.4      | 9                          | 7     | .8       | 10                 | 8          | 1.0      |
| Interferred with my class attendance.                    | 18           | 23    | 15     | 9.2**    | 67      | 21      | 23      | 10      | 27.8***  | 18               | 20    | 15    | 19    | 1.8      | 17                         | 20    | .7       | 17                 | 21         | 2.7      |
| Interferred with my preparation for exams                | 12           | 15    | 9      | 6.1**    | 33      | 29      | 14      | 7       | 17.8***  | 9                | 13    | 12    | 12    | 1.4      | 11                         | 15    | 2.6      | 13                 | 12         | .0       |
| Caused conflicts with close friend(s)-opposite sex       | 17           | 19    | 15     | 1.5      | 67      | 33      | 18      | 14      | 12.1**   | 19               | 20    | 15    | 15    | 2.7      | 16                         | 24    | 6.2**    | 19                 | 17         | .9       |
| Caused conflicts with close friend(s)-same sex           | 12           | 11    | 12     | .2       | 67      | 29      | 14      | 10      | 16.4***  | 15               | 14    | 13    | 9     | 4.6      | 12                         | 15    | 1.5      | 17                 | 10         | 9.3**    |
| Damaged other friendships                                | 4            | 4     | 3      | .5       | 0       | 13      | 4       | 2       | 7.5      | 5                | 5     | 1     | 4     | 4.8      | 4                          | 5     | .6       | 5                  | 2          | 4.9*     |
| Caused me to miss appointments.                          | 3            | 3     | 2      | 2.1      | 0       | 8       | 3       | 0       | 13.5**   | 4                | 2     | 2     | 3     | 1.1      | 2                          | 4     | 2.2      | 3                  | 3          | .2       |
| Caused me to lose job(s)                                 | 4            | 1     | 0      | 4.6*     | 0       | 0       | 1       | 0       | .8       | 1                | 0     | 0     | 1     | 2.2      | 1                          | 0     | .9       | 1                  | 0          | .0       |
| Caused accident to myself or others                      | 3            | 4     | 2      | 1.7      | 0       | 4       | 2       | 3       | .6       | 5                | 3     | 2     | 3     | 2.8      | 3                          | 3     | .0       | 4                  | 3          | 1.0      |
| Caused me to forego other things due to alcohol expense. | 16           | 18    | 14     | 3.3      | 33      | 21      | 18      | 13      | 5.8      | 12               | 17    | 19    | 14    | 4.2      | 15                         | 20    | 3.1      | 16                 | 17         | .1       |
| Bad Hangover(s)                                          | 32           | 36    | 31     | 2.6      | 67      | 25      | 35      | 28      | 7.3      | 30               | 36    | 32    | 31    | 1.7      | 30                         | 40    | 5.8*     | 32                 | 35         | .6       |
| Loss of memory                                           | 18           | 18    | 18     | .0       | 33      | 13      | 20      | 15      | 4.7      | 17               | 18    | 18    | 19    | .8       | 17                         | 25    | 6.1**    | 18                 | 19         | .1       |
| Blackouts                                                | 7            | 9     | 5      | 4.3*     | 0       | 0       | 8       | 6       | 4.1      | 4                | 7     | 9     | 7     | 3.1      | 6                          | 9     | 2.1      | 7                  | 7          | .0       |
| Doing something later regretted                          | 34           | 35    | 33     | .2       | 67      | 46      | 33      | 34      | 3.2      | 34               | 42    | 36    | 29    | 9.8      | 32                         | 41    | 4.1*     | 37                 | 34         | .7       |
| My drinking since coming to CMU has increased            | 37           | 44    | 34     | 8.4**    | 33      | 42      | 39      | 37      | .6       | 29               | 34    | 42    | 41    | 9.5*     | 38                         | 34    | 1.0      | 36                 | 42         | 3.4      |

NOTE: Numbers in parentheses are Ns for each column. The actual n for each item may vary somewhat due to missing data. Percentages are percent of column totals for each item.

TABLE 3

Negative Consequences for Others of Drinking Alcohol by Demographic Variables

|                                                                          | %<br>Population | % Sex |        | $\chi^2$ | % GPA   |         |         |         | $\chi^2$ | % Year in School |       |       |       | $\chi^2$ | % Parents<br>Alcohol<br>Problems |       | $\chi^2$ | % Living<br>Situation |            | $\chi^2$ |
|--------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------|-------|--------|----------|---------|---------|---------|---------|----------|------------------|-------|-------|-------|----------|----------------------------------|-------|----------|-----------------------|------------|----------|
|                                                                          |                 | Male  | Female |          | 0.0-0.9 | 1.0-1.9 | 2.0-2.9 | 3.0-4.0 |          | Fr               | So    | Jr    | Sr    |          | No                               | Yes   |          | Hall                  | Off Campus |          |
|                                                                          | (927)           | (351) | (532)  |          | (3)     | (24)    | (459)   | (377)   |          | (170)            | (187) | (208) | (350) |          | (762)                            | (165) |          | (408)                 | (446)      |          |
| Relatives<br>drinking problem                                            | 37              | 34    | 38     | 1.3      | 0       | 3       | 51      | 46      | 3.4      | 36               | 33    | 35    | 42    | 4.9      | 32                               | 58    | 26.9***  | 33                    | 49         | 3.7*     |
| Friends at CMU<br>drinking problem                                       | 43              | 45    | 55     | 10.4***  | 0       | 30      | 43      | 45      | 2.6      | 32               | 38    | 46    | 49    | 18.9***  | 41                               | 54    | 8.4**    | 38                    | 49         | 9.4**    |
| Friends other than<br>CMU friends have<br>drinking problem               | 45              | 50    | 42     | 5.0*     | 0       | 39      | 45      | 44      | 1.1      | 43               | 46    | 46    | 45    | .3       | 41                               | 60    | 16.7***  | 44                    | 46         | .3       |
| Know CMU Student<br>has/had drinking<br>problem                          | 39              | 44    | 36     | 5.3*     | 0       | 25      | 40      | 40      | 4.2      | 27               | 37    | 40    | 46    | 19.4***  | 38                               | 43    | 1.3      | 36                    | 45         | 6.5**    |
| Know student who<br>left CMU due to<br>alcohol problem                   | 11              | 14    | 10     | 2.9      | 0       | 8       | 13      | 10      | 1.7      | 6                | 12    | 8     | 16    | 15.4**   | 11                               | 13    | .4       | 9                     | 14         | 5.6**    |
| Know student whose<br>academic performance<br>suffered due<br>to alcohol | 44              | 50    | 41     | 6.9**    | 33      | 58      | 43      | 44      | 2.2      | 39               | 46    | 45    | 45    | 1.8      | 43                               | 47    | 1.0      | 45                    | 46         | .0       |
| Know of alcohol<br>related residence<br>hall damage                      | 56              | 64    | 50     | 12.5***  | 33      | 58      | 56      | 56      | .7       | 39               | 63    | 59    | 58    | 23.1***  | 56                               | 56    | .0       | 60                    | 55         | 2.7      |
| Know of alcohol<br>related disciplinary<br>expulsion from<br>CMU         | 10              | 13    | 9      | 2.2      | 0       | 25      | 12      | 9       | 7.6*     | 12               | 14    | 8     | 9     | 5.4      | 10                               | 13    | 1.2      | 15                    | 7          | 11.7***  |

NOTE: Numbers in parentheses are Ns for each column. The actual n for each item may vary somewhat due to missing data. Percentages are percent of column totals for each item.

\*  $p \leq .05$     \*\*  $p \leq .01$     \*\*\*  $p \leq .001$